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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: OMAN MEDIA REACTION: Ongoing Trafficking Coverage

REF: Muscat 444

11. SUMMARY: Negative coverage of the TIP report continued to dominate news articles, editorials, and commentaries through the weekend and into Monday. After recent statements to the press from the Majlis A'Shura (reftel Muscat 444) and other government officials, Foreign Ministry Secretary General Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi spoke to private Arabic daily "Az Zamman" stating that Oman "expects a response". Private Arabic daily "Al Watan" ran a piece claiming a "diplomatic source" said "the State Department intends to revise and review the report". "Al Watan" continued almost daily commentaries repeating common anti-U.S. accusations. END SUMMARY.

Sayyid Badr: "We do expect a response on this issue"

12. On June 16, private Arabic daily "Az Zamman" ran an exclusive statement by Sayyid Badr, his second statement to the press on TIP, reaffirming Oman's expectation of a response to the June 9 meeting with the Ambassador.

"Sayyid Badr stressed that, 'The Sultanate expects a response from the U.S. Administration after it delivered an official protest against the U.S. Department of State report placing the Sultanate among countries that did not exert efforts to combat trafficking in persons.' In a special statement to "Az Zamman", Sayyid Badr remarked that, 'they certainly expressed interest and we do expect a response on this issue. That is what we hope to get from a friendly country.' Replying to a question on the impact of what had happened on the bilateral relations, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, 'We hope that there will be no adverse impact on the relations between our two friendly countries, and that has never been the goal of our protesting. It was rather correcting information for the public opinion. We always seek realism and positivism. What happened was a reaction to the false and baseless report. We have expressed our opinion as it is.'"

Reporting From the Diplomatic Rumor Mill

13. On June 16, private Arabic daily "Al Watan" (circulation 42,000) ran a story based on a statement by a vaguely identified "diplomatic source" that, "The US Department of State Responds to the Sultanate's Protest by Reassessing the Report":

"'Al Watan' learned from informed sources that the U.S. Department of State received the Sultanate's protest with great interest. According to a diplomatic source, the State Department intends to reassess and revise the report. The source attributed Washington's reviewing its position to its desire for a fair evaluation and to its strategic relationship with the Sultanate. This came amid widespread state rejection and condemnation on official and public

levels of the report on trafficking in persons, which did not treat the Sultanate fairly, and disregarded its efforts to combat this international issue."

Al Watan Continues its Cause

¶4. On June 12, 13, and 15, "Al Watan" continued its string of commentaries on TIP. As was the case with last year's TIP release, "Al Watan" leads the press offensive in coverage and negativity of tone. Below are block quotations:

"Any country that refuses to comply with its [the U.S.'s] policies is classified as being in violation of international legitimacy or supportive of terrorism and trafficking in persons."

"The U.S. administration is deliberately sowing seeds of hostility between its people and...friendly countries with whom Americans have deep rooted relations, such as Oman. Despite these relations, the U.S. drafted a slanderous report without any material evidence that classified the Sultanate among countries that traffic in persons."

"We are a people who cherish and respect the covenants of international relations and who are committed to the practice of neutral policies in the context of self-esteem and preservation. We cannot keep silent on the accusations of the U.S. State Department, or on its lies and allegations about trafficking in persons."

ONLINE: "Yes We Traffic" Stokes Ire

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¶5. Oman's most active online discussion site, Al Sabla (www.omania2.net), posted strong reaction to the publishing of the TIP report. One discussion thread, titled "Yes We traffic in Persons" received 174 comments and 8,627 views, ranking as one of the most active threads in the forum. 90% of responses defended the Omani stand on the TIP report, attacking the way the report was drafted and its lack of evidence.
FONTENEAU